# NWK: The Reality Show

## Variant for Playing Next War: Korea

Those of you who have taken **Next War: Korea** (NWK) for a spin have probably noticed by now that the Korean People's Army (KPA) and Air Force (KPAF) are fairly formidable in the game (the latter for only a little while, of course). One of the underlying assumptions of the game is that somehow, either through relaxation or negligence on the part of the international community and its enforcement of sanctions combined with the willingness of the PRC to surreptitiously defy those sanctions, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) has managed to overcome several of its economic and military challenges in terms of food, spare parts, new equipment, etc. It's not a completely unreasonable assumption if you consider that a tip regarding possible drug shipments was the only reason a recent load of weapons and spare parts bound for North Korea was found and seized by the Panamanians[1]. That indicates that there are active elements of a strategy to circumvent the sanctions. Stopping one shipment should make one wonder how many others got through.

The fact is, though, while the KPA and KPAF are dangerous looking forces on paper, the reality lies somewhere below the capability as depicted in *Next War: Korea*. Although there is no denying that the KPA is a large, relatively well-armed force composed for the most part of troops who have been brought up within the philosophy of *Juche* (basically, extreme self-reliance), that force is also largely underfed and under-trained. However, as Stalin is reputed to have stated, "quantity has a quality all its own."

That sentiment can also be applied to the KPAF, which maintains a large inventory of aircraft ranging from relatively capable aircraft such as the MiG-29 to Korean War vintage MiG-15s. Although numbers can matter in terms of controlling a particular patch of sky, as is represented in the Air Superiority calculation within the game, it only applies if you can actually get the planes in the air. Within the game, the KPAF is generously assumed to have parts, pilots, and fuel for the vast majority of its airframes to fly. The Pilot Skill modifiers portray fairly well the fact that KPAF pilots only fly around 25 training hours *per year* (more for the MiG-29 pilots)[2], but the reality is that it is highly unlikely the North could sortie many of their older airframes at all in a combat situation.

You may be asking what the point of all of this is. Most games carry an underlying assumption or two. Obviously, I've outlined one of the few upon which the NWK game system rests. This goes along with other assumptions such as that both the US and Commonwealth would honor their treaty obligations in the event of a war on the peninsula. Another major foundational assumption is that the People's Republic of China (PRC) not only has a vested interest in maintaining the DPRK as a buffer state through whatever means necessary, but the PRC would quite possibly couple and manipulate that requirement to help forcibly reunite Taiwan with the rest of China. The latter assumption is ably represented in **Next War: Taiwan**.

So, to challenge the primary assumption outlined here and provide players with another experience of the game that more closely approaches "reality" (if you will excuse my use of that word in the context of a game), I have undertaken to provide some modifications, with commentary explaining the reasoning, to the base setup and values for the DPRK forces as follows:

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[1] Dorell, Oren (2013, July). Seized missile radars on N. Korean ship a threat to aircraft. Retrieved from
http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2013/07/16/panama-north-korean-ship/2520109/
[2] Lavere, Rick. (2013, June). Air Power Analysis: North Korea. Combat Aircraft Monthly. pp.8-9.

1. Remove both DPRK AMPHs from all scenarios and disallow DPRK Sea Transport unless the PRC intervenes. *Comment:* It's highly unlikely that the DPRK troop lift capable units would sortie and risk being sunk in the face of superior Allied naval power, and, in addition, it's a far stretch to have the DPRK Naval Infantry pulling off a successful Amphibious Invasion. The Naval Infantry should still be in the game and operate like normal troops, but they won't be able to make an Amphibious Assault.

2. Reduce the Efficiency Rating of all DPRK ground units by "2" across the board except for the 105th Armored Division/820th Corps. *Comment:* This should accurately capture the reduced capability which comes from using your troops as farm labor rather than having them conducting training. In addition, there's likely to be some desertion, if not good old fashioned "breakdown in discipline" (i.e., looting), which will lower the unit cohesion. The only exception would be for the 105th Armored Division/820th Corps. This unit receives plenty of food, good equipment, and is considered the premier unit in the KPA.

3. In Advanced Game scenarios, reduce the number of available airframes for the KPAF as follows. For each air unit type below roll a die; if the die roll is within the range specified, the air unit may setup and be used normally, otherwise, it is not available for the scenario:
    a. F-5: 0
    b. F-6: 0-1
    c. F-7: 0-2
    d. MiG-21: 0-4
    e. MiG-23: 0-5
    f. H-5: 0-2
    g. Q-5: 0-3
    h. Su-7: 0-4 (Note, one source indicates this airframe appears to have been retired from the KPAF inventory, but I can find no other corroboration, hence a 50% chance of still being around)
    i. MiG-29, Su-25: setup and use normally (no roll required)

    *Comment*: The KPAF primarily uses the MiG-15s and F-5s as trainers, but they could be armed in an emergency, and the North Koreans don't have enough equipment to be picky about what they throw in the air. However, as outlined above, they lack spare parts, adequate maintenance, fuel, and enough trained pilots not to crash on take-off much less enter a combat zone. These numbers represent an educated guess on the availability of airframes and the capability to cannibalize enough parts, etc. to allow some planes to fly.

4. Air Defenses are affected as follows:
    a. In Standard Game scenarios, apply a +2 DRM to any Air Points determination die roll or Air Defense Fire roll by the DPRK.
    b. In Advanced Game scenarios, reduce the initial DPRK Detection and SAM Air Defense Track values by three (3).

5. Reduce DPRK supply. The DPRK may never have more than two Supply Depots on map at any one time. In addition, they may never have more than two MSU's at any one time. Finally, halve their initial allotment of Supply Points. *Comment:* The overall supply situation for the KPA is unknown. It's highly likely that they have plenty of bullets. However, while it's assumed they receive enough beans for normal consumption, the stockpile and resupply of them is also unknown as is their ability to create sustainable logistics lines and even this change is probably overly generous.

Using the above guidelines should provide a more accurate overall feel for how the KPA/KPAF will operate and fare in a relatively contemporary conflict should they feel the need to follow through on any of their "promises" of renewing the war.

Even though this is titled "Reality Show," the true reality is that we just don't know how capable the DPRK armed forces really are. This variant, however, can give players some guidance on where I believe the changes can be made. For instance, I chose a two ER drop across the board for the KPA. That's primarily due to conversations with some folks and news stories regarding how much training they actually receive, etc. Perhaps it should only been a one ER drop. Who really knows? When I play (which isn't as often while working on Next War: Taiwan (NWT), I'll likely keep the ER as is and just make the naval, supply, and air unit changes. The beautiful part is that you're free to play it however you like!

I sincerely hope you enjoy the game!